

Lot's Flight.

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BEING THE
SUBSTANCE
OF A
DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN
PEMBROKE,

On Sunday, October 14, 1753.

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By JOHN CENNICK.

"Remember Lot's Wife." Luke xvii. 32.

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GEN. XIX. 17.

Escape for thy Life; look not behind thee; neither stay thou in all the Plain: escape to the Mountain, lest thou be consumed.

THESE words the angels spake to Lot and his family when they had brought them out of Sodom, and were about to take leave of them. The blessed spirits seemed apprehensive of their being yet in danger either of loitering, or looking back, or staying in the plain, though they were out of the city, and therefore puts them in mind their lives were at stake, and to be disobedient now, or to delay, would be to run the risk of being consumed, and, in the most pressing manner, charges them in my text, to make the best of their way, and fly for their lives.

This part of the divine history is really most affecting: Here we may see at once both the goodness and severity of God, his goodness in saving Lot's house, his severity in destroying the cities of that country in so awful a manner.

It appears, by what precedes my text, that all those unhappy cities, and the country round about, had abounded in all plenty, and pride, and fulness of bread, as we read in Ezek. xvi. 49. had made them forget God, and in general they

were gone into strange and unnatural lusts, so that "the cry of their sins was gone up to heaven, and the Lord was come down to destroy it." We read in the eighteenth chapter, that three angels came to Abraham the day before, and staid with him all night, but two of them only came to Sodom, and rose up early in the morning; but the third, who no doubt was the Angel of the covenant, Christ Jesus, staid behind and revealed to Abraham what was in his heart to do to Sodom and the adjacent cities. For a good while the faithful patriarch pleaded, and made intercession for the city, but at last he submitted, and the "Lord went his way from communing with Abraham, and he returned to his place."

Here we may observe many things worthy our notice: First, how our Saviour would not bring his judgments upon a wicked place, but he would first acquaint his servants, lest they should have been too much surprized at the sudden stroke, or questioned if the righteous were not destroyed as well as the ungodly, and so might have all their life-time been in jeopardy, lest he that had visited so heavily those of Sodom, might by and by visit them also in the same way; therefore would God set the matter in a right light before his children, ere the vengeance and the storm fell.

Again, we may see how our Saviour humbled himself to stay and lodge in a tent, and disdained not of old to appear in the form of a man, for in the human form he and his angels appeared to Abraham, chap. xvii. 2. We have no right to grudge this happiness to Abraham, Lot, &c. for the same Lord and Saviour yet dwells with his children, and not as a guest that tarrieth for a night, but he comes to make his abode with us; and
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no doubt many angels guard the beds and houses of such as are heirs of salvation. And this is no wonder that they minister to us in this way, for they were witnesses what Jesus suffered to redeem us, and saw him in his worst agonies and sorrows to save us, and must count it an honour to attend upon souls whom God purchased with his own blood. Might they speak with us, I am persuaded they would often accost us, as once Gabriel did the blessed virgin, with "Hail, thou highly favoured;" but this shall be done in worlds to come; and now they are continually ascending and descending before the throne, to receive orders concerning us; and are daily employed and busied in ministering and serving to us: But I think we have a good reason to give why we may not see them, but upon some particular occasions, nor speak with them; and that is, lest we should be tempted to worship them, or ascribe our safety to them, and dishonour and even rob our Saviour their Master and Maker; and had we liberty to commune with them, it would not be so well with us as now, for then we should be too apt to live without that near fellowship which we now have with Jesus Christ himself, and this is better than to have communion with all the angels in heaven.

But another thing is observable, and that is, the diligence which was seen in the angels, for "they rose up early in the morning," and went about their grand business, which was the saving of Lot, the nephew of Abraham. O that the ministers, who are a sort of angels to the churches, and have an office, in many respects, like the angels, would learn hence, that their business is the king's business, and requires haste, and that early and late they
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would pursue it, and even not stay to salute any man by the way, when Jesus sends them; I mean, not stand complimenting and trifling with souls, but plainly, boldly, and at the loss of all things, deal in their work as servants of that Master, with whom is no respect of persons, and have his charge so at heart, that till they have finished their course, and laid down their staff and sandals, they might grudge no labour and spare no pains to win souls out of danger, and get them to flee out of spiritual Sodom.

When the angels came into the city, they stood in the street opposite to Lot's door, as if they would try the good man, but he would not rest till they were come in to him, but little thought who he had entertained. He little thought that they were come to be saviours to him; such blessings yet attend the receiving and being hospitable to strangers. Many, who have received unawares a child of God into their houses, may, in the last day, hear our Saviour say to them, "I was a stranger and ye took me in;" and when they shall say, "When, Lord?" He shall answer, "Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it to me." As soon as Lot had brought in his guests, the men of the city, filled with lust, would rush in also and know these men; and all the entreaties and wholesome advice he could make use of was of so little effect, that they were only so much the ruder, till the angels pulled in Lot, and smote the men with blindness. Hear this, ye poor adulterers, ye unclean, and ye who abuse yourselves with lusts, and know that the whole is but fuel for the fire of the last day; but get you to the cold sweat of Jesus, those great drops alone can check and damp the unholy fire, and make you, though
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ever so polluted, clean; and like virgins before the throne of God.

As soon as Lot was got in again, the angels began their weighty message thus: "Hast thou any sons or daughters, or sons in law in this place? or whatever thou hast, bring them out of this city; for we will destroy it. The cry of their sin is gone up to heaven, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it." Lot believed the word of God immediately, and went out to warn his sons in law, and those of his children that were married out, but all in vain. He seemed to them only as one that had dreamed. I suppose he told them, Up, my children, and come out of this city with me; for, before the sun is well risen to-morrow, this place shall be laid in ashes, and the souls therein shall perish. But, as I said, however affecting and awful the warning had been to him, it had no great effect on them. They thought, Poor Lot! he has got new fancies, he has always preached to us before now, but this is a new fear that has got into his brain; and they mocked him, and he went grieved away. Just so the scoffers of our age make their game, and the drunkards make songs on such as come to invite them from endless ruin: And they do it upon the same ground as the children and relations of Lot when they mocked him. I do not doubt but they looked out and saw the evening as clear and calm as ever, no sign of any storm, nor a thunder-cloud in all the sky, nor the least appearance of lightnings, or any other blazing lights in the air; and so could reasonably conclude, it was only a dream of their religious but weak-headed father. Men may now see no sign of any approaching evil, bless God that they live in a land of plenty, under a mild government, and in peace, and out of fear of invasions
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from abroad, &c. and so can despise their religious parents kind admonitions and warnings, laugh at the preachers of God's word, and mock those who would beseech them to be reconciled to God, and come out of the world to be saved: But let them only remember the words of our Saviour, "As it was in the day when Lot went out of Sodom, they eat, they drank, were married and given in marriage, they bought, they sold, they planted and builded, till the fire and brimstone rained down from heaven and destroyed them all; so, he says, shall it be when the Son of man shall come in his day. Watch ye, therefore, lest that day come suddenly, and ye be unprepared."

When Lot was returned home, and the day broke, the angels hastened him, and bid him "fly with his wife, and the two young daughters who were there with him, lest he also should perish in the same iniquity as the city." He had been striving and labouring with others so long, that he had well nigh staved and perished himself. This should serve to teach us, that though we do right in warning, yea in intreating and persuading our friends and relations to come with us and follow the Lamb; yet if they will not, we must not stay with them: In this case, therefore, we must leave our father and mother, and brethren and sisters, and wife and children, or whoever is dear to us, and go to heaven without them, rather than by thinking to yield a little for the present, to succeed with our purpose hereafter, we stay ourselves and be involved in their ruin. This has many times been the case: Arise, therefore, and leave all the world, and follow thou Jesus out of the camp, bearing his reproach, for the Lord will certainly destroy this place: this world shall soon be consumed, and all the kindreds of the earth shall

shall mourn in that day, when he will burn up all like an oven, and when all the ungodly shall be like stubble before his fire. In that day shall it be said, "Blessed are all they that have put their trust in him."

I suppose Lot had much to do, and was careful what he should pack up, and what he should want on his flight, &c. Hence it is said, "He lingered, and then the angels took hold on his hand, and on the hand of his wife, and on the hand of his two daughters, (the Lord being merciful to them) and brought them out of the gate of Sodom," and then gave them a solemn charge, "Now escape for thy life, look not behind thee, stay not in all the plains lest thou be consumed, but escape to the mountains, for I can do nothing till thou art come."

Who could have thought that Lot, who had so stedfastly believed the word of God, and had so eagerly laboured to get out his children and relations, could have lingered himself? Yea this went so far, that had not the Lord been doubly merciful to him, he had staid and perished after all.

Hear this, ye serious people, who surely believe that the Lord will destroy this world, who look upon yourselves as called out of it, and who are pilgrims and strangers in the earth, and who yet linger. You are so careful of your many matters, so busied and cumbered about many things, that though called so long ago, you have not perhaps yet fled to the refuge, nor laid hold on the horns of the altar; you have not yet made your calling and election sure, nor got safety in God's hiding place. O may the Lord be merciful to you, and take hold on your hands and hearts, and bring you out! May he force you from your cares and lingering in your uncertain state, and with a high he d and

stretched-out arm lead you out of all danger, and set you above the reach of men or devils : Nor let this world, or the world to come, nor life, nor death, or any power be ever able to pluck you out of his hands, or separate you from his love.

When Lot heard this, and knew the mountains were at a great distance, and began to tremble for fear he should not be able to reach them before the storm fell, he entreated the Lord to let him turn into a cave in the little city of Zoar ; and God said, " See, I have accepted thee in this thing ; make haste, for I can do nothing till thou art come thither." Here is mercy upon mercy, and grace for grace ! For though he had loitered, the Lord would not destroy Sodom till he was safe ; and when his strength failed, and he could not hold out to the mountains, God provided him a cave of refuge in Zoar, and hid him there till the wrath was overpast. I do not doubt but as soon as he entered the cave and saw the flames fall, and heard the overthrow of the cities, he adored that Lord who had been merciful to him and brought him out, and comforted himself in his little asylum. Here I will leave him then and his daughters a little, and look back upon his poor wife ; for she, notwithstanding the strict charge of the angel, " Look not behind thee," had ventured to do it, and was struck dead, and left as a standing monument of disobedience upon the plain. She had left the city, with her husband and daughters, but, perhaps, thought upon the riches, the fine streets and well-adorned houses, which now must all be burnt and destroyed, and in her heart turned back ; and, while she looked about to see the city once more before it was in flames, she was turned into a pillar of salt. So some have left the world in its

its lying vanities, have forsook all the delicacies of the mother of harlots, and followed the Saviour and his people a little while, but have by-and-by secretly wished for some of the old pleasures, the sweet darling sins which they had left; they have forgot that they were called to be a sort of spiritual Rachabites, and have wanted houses, lands, or wished to indulge themselves a little longer in the feasts and drinkings of this world before it should be all burnt up; and they have been there left and made spectacles for angels and men, who were unworthy of the kingdom, and loved the world better than our Saviour. O my dear friends, you who are now escaped out of the world, and at any time should find a hankering after the things you have left, hear what our Saviour says, "Remember Lot's wife!" Yes, remember her fall, and run your race, looking to Jesus, resolved not to go back, nor even to look back, lest you also fall through the same example of unbelief.

The same message which the angels brought to Lot, I bring to you to-day, "Up, for the Lord will destroy this place." This world, however fine and goodly, however pleasant or valuable, shall, ere long, feel the fire of the great Refiner. The beautiful sun, that governed this day, shall be darkened, the moon shall be turned to blood; and those bright stars that have ruled the night, and lightened the dark pavilion of the heavens, shall fall and be darkened: Every mountain and the green hills shall depart, and every well-built city, and every fine house, shall be destroyed, and not one stone left upon another which shall not be thrown down. Let me not seem to you as one that has dreamed: Do not believe as the sons and daughters of Lot, but know ye, "the mouth of

the Lord hath spoken it, and he will do it. Up, then, and escape for your life, for your eternal life, look not behind you, neither stay in all the plains, lest you be consumed."

"Escape for thy life:" This belongs to every soul under heaven, and intimates so much: Thou art in danger, thy life is at stake, but there is a refuge; there is a storm coming, but there is a hiding-place prepared by him who is not willing any should perish, but that all should come to the Knowledge of the Truth and be saved. If the danger I speak of was only that of losing our temporal lives, O that would be but little; and yet, even in such a case, what pains and labours do some take; and at what expences are they to support or to preserve a life, which is but like a weaver's shuttle, and like a dream at best? But the life I speak of is for ever and ever. If you therefore have a mind to escape the danger of the second death, if you have a desire to get everlasting life, you may. Our Saviour sets it before you, and tells you, "Come unto me, believe in me, look upon me, and you shall not perish, you shall have everlasting life." He has appointed a place of sanctuary, a refuge in the stormy wind and tempest; and whoever sees or fears the impending judgments which shall come upon the world; whoever is willing to leave all and follow him, he shall not cry as if there was no safety, he shall not be in such a state for which there is no remedy, no help, no cure; for though his sins are numberless, great and heinous; though the remembrance of them is grievous, and the burden of them intolerable; though they were more in number than the hairs upon his head, and though his heart fails, still there is a place to fly to, there is an
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asylum, there is an altar, a sanctuary, from which none have ever been dragged. It is the cross of Jesus, it is our Saviour: Escape hither, and thy soul shall live. Whoever comes to his blood shall never perish; it is the very fountain of life, and was opened because of sin and uncleanness. Out of mere pity and grace our Saviour contrived this, for the healing of the nations, and invites all to these waters: All the many heavy and even terrible things spoken of in the scripture, either of the judgment to come, of death, or the chains of darkness, is only, if possible, to awaken the soul to a sense of the reality of that loss it can sustain if it stays with the world in the unregenerate state; and, therefore is it as often, and far more often shewn what love Jesus bears to sinners; how he has died for them; how he is not pleased with the death of them that die, but would have them come to him, and be saved; and the language of his tender heart hourly is: "Escape for thy life: Come to me, and I will receive thee; ask of me, and I will give thee living water: Escape to me, and thou shalt live." May all that hear me obey his voice, hearken, and come, and so save their souls alive!

The next part of the text is: "Look not behind thee." This belongs to such as have been awakened, and are really concerned about their salvation. Our Saviour knew how many snares should be laid for such well-meaning souls; how many contrivances satan and the world would have to seduce them back; therefore in general he charges them: "Look not behind thee. Remember Lot's wife." Remember, "he that putteth his hand to the plow and looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of God." The charge he gave the prophet, who
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cried against the altar in Bethel, is what he gives to thee, "Turn not again by the way thou camest." You know what wonders God wrought in saving his people once out of Egypt; how he fought for them, how he dried up a way for them through the sea, and made the waters stand on heaps on each side till they were safe over; how he plagued Egypt till they let them go, and at last buried all the hosts of Pharaoh that pursued them in the deeps of the waters, and then set the good land of Canaan before them—"a land flowing with milk and honey; the glory of all lands." But after all, those who before had groaned under the bondage of the heathen, and had cried in their affliction and were delivered, forgot it, and began to wish for the flesh-pots of Egypt, garlick, onions, and cucumbers; and though they had manna and fowl in abundance, and were kept with water out of the rock, they were not contented: "In their hearts, it is said, they turned back into Egypt; wherefore God was not pleased with them, but they perished in the wilderness." They despised the land before them, and chose present blessings, though so small and trifling, and it became a hurt to them, so that they could not enter into his rest. Many serious people set out after a good manner, they run well, till by and-by somewhat of their old pleasures appear before them, their company persuade, their own lusts tempt, and the enemy is perpetually busy in seeking to get them to look back, and at last he succeeds; "they return as a dog to his vomit, and as a sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire." These are they, who, for the sake of temporal riches, or pleasures, or for other things, venture the loss of the heavenly Canaan, the New-Jerusalem,

Jerusalem, and the true promised land; these are they who look back, and fall again into their old sins by little and little, and despise the glory of all lands. Not so did Moses; he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to be a prince, and be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and enjoy the pleasures of sin, which are for a season. His eye was to another world; nor would he look back till he had entered, by the gates, the paradise of God. Be ye, my brethren, not like the disobedient wife of Lot; count it not a pity that this whole world, and its fashions and rarities pass away, and are burnt up without being enjoyed by you; you have a better world, and a kingdom that cannot be shaken before you. Nor be you like the foolish Israelites, who forgot so easily and so soon their cruel servitude in Egypt, and only remembered their flesh-pots and herbs, and so displeased God their Saviour. No, never forget the cruel slavery you have been in under the yoke of satan, and out of what extreme distress and deep misery you have groaned when you served sin, and felt the fearful smart of a guilty mind, and the looking for judgment. Above all, forget not the price God the Lamb paid to rescue you from such a thralldom and cursed state; how he trembled and sweat blood, and was so many years acquainted with grief only to ransom you. O do not play with the Most High, or trifle with Jesus; but leave all, nor dare cast a wishful look back on any of your former sins, or on this world, for it is dangerous; but, "escape for thy life, and look not behind thee."

The third part of the text is: "Neither stay thou in all the plains; escape to the mountains, lest thou be consumed."

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This belongs to people who are come out from the world, who are very much against looking back, but yet settle in a strange lukewarm estate; and with all their cry against the world, and condemning of apostates, themselves are staying, as it were, in the plains, and not arrived at the mark of the prize of their high calling; they are not yet happily persuaded of their interest in Christ; they have not received the earnest of their everlasting inheritance, and do not know their sins are forgiven. Of these there are many in the world whose hearts daily misgive them, and who inwardly feel they are not right, and yet stay or halt, almost persuaded to be christians. These are they to whom the Holy Ghost gives this advice, "Stay not in all the plains, but escape to the mountains." By the mountains we may understand, in a spiritual sense, the mount Zion, the everlasting hills, the end and height of all our aims in this pilgrimage. But lest you might think as Lot did when he found himself grow weary and tired, "O let me turn into Zoar and live;" lest you might think, O I am afraid I shall never hold out, I shall not arrive timely to the mount of God, I feel my strength very little, and my corruptions and sins strong: therefore has God, your God, the Saviour, your Saviour, prepared for you a Zoar; he has ordered a cave whereto you may fly; it is his own open side! His wounds are the best refuge, the safest and most secure place to fly to in heaven and earth. Methinks I hear him say to you, I know thy weakness; I know thy little strength, and how thou wouldst not hold out till thou shouldst reach the eternal rest; the storm would have surely overtaken thee, and thou wouldst have been consumed; therefore behold my hands and my feet; see my pierced side, and turn in there,

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and no harm shall befall thee. This shall be to thee like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. This is the voice of our Beloved; and this is his language to guilty souls, who are flying for their lives. There is indeed no other plea you may try, and God's sword will find you; his fire shall burn you out: the avenger of blood will pursue you, and cut you in pieces; but turn in there; fly to the wounded Lamb of God, take refuge under his shadow, and you shall be safe in time and in eternity, in the hour of death and in the day of judgment. O turn to that friend of sinners, that city of refuge; betake yourself to Jesus, and lay open all your frights and fears, your guilt and sins before him. He will hear you, he will accept you, and shew mercy to you, and under his wings you shall rest, and none shall make you afraid.

Just so as Lot could comfort himself in his cave, when all around him was in flames, so shall you comfort yourself in Christ's wounds, and in his arms you shall feel that peace the busy and cumbered world are strangers to; that joy which they meddle not with; and that safety in the assurance of your everlasting part in the love of God as is inexpressible. You will then be for inviting all into your strong-hold; every affrighted sinner you will call into your refuge, and every uneasy heart intreat to come and rest with you out of the reach of all harm or dangers. Do not then linger any longer you half-minded people, nor make light of it; for hear only how weighty it is to our Lord God, "I can do nothing, he saith, till thou art come." As if he had said, knowest thou, my poor child, why the angels with their destroying weapons are ordered not yet to destroy: or why those who have the power over the winds, are forbid to hurt the earth, or any

green tree: or why the so long threatened tempest is delayed, and the storm kept back? it is because thou art not yet marked, thou art not yet got into the city of refuge; thou art in an unsafe and insecure estate, and I am so tender over thee, I cannot suffer the last trumpet to blow, nor set the angel to proclaim "time shall be no longer," till thou hast escaped into the true Zoar; till my new name has sealed thee to the day of redemption, and my bleeding wounds have sheltered thee, O my child, make haste and escape hither, for I can do nothing till thou art come. This is indeed the case: if Jesus was not in heaven, with his vesture dipt in blood; if his cries and tears did not avail so powerfully, and his intercession take such effect, before now we had been like Sodom and Gomorrah, or Admah and Zeboim; and Tyre and Sidon had not been in a more wretched estate than we. And this is the true reason why judgments and sudden taking of vengeance is not so frequent now as formerly: then fire from heaven, earthquakes, plagues, and many shocking strokes of divine justice chastened the sins of whole countries, and of particular men, but now our High-priest stands before the throne; he spreads out his hands, and turns away the wrath. Instead thereof he invites the sinner to him, and having borne the storm and weight of all our wrath in his own body and soul when he hung on the tree, he has the just right to shelter whom he will. May all that hear me to-day take the alarm, "Up for the Lord will destroy this place." And because ye surely expect it yourselves, and believe ere long the world that now is, shall be consumed, and that all who belong to it will perish, therefore, "escape for your lives; look not behind you, nor stay in all the plains; but hasten to Jesus, and obtain of him pardon

don and eternal life; and then let the judgments come when they will, you shall be safe, and like virgins ready to meet the Bridegroom. You shall not be in danger by any means; Jesus shall be your Saviour, and "the eternal God your refuge; his everlasting arms shall be underneath you," and his wounds shall shelter you in your last hours, in the great day and in all eternity. You shall find what the scripture means which saith, "A man shall be for a hiding-place in the storm, and a covert in the wind and tempest, and like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." In the day when the sign of the Son of Man shall be seen coming in the clouds of heaven in his Father's glory, and with his ten thousands of saints, and all his holy angels, when the heavens shall melt at his presence, and a shower of fire shall burn up the earth, and all shall tremble and be shaken terribly, that soul shall be happy who has made his wounds their Zoar, and who have in time of grace and salvation fled to his side for refuge. That harbour is safer and better than the city into which Lot turned; more secure than the sanctuary in the temple, and that cave more nigh to every affrighted soul, who would fain flee from wrath to come, and more real commodious and suitable than that wherein Lot hid with his daughters, or that wherein Elias was preserved when the strong wind passed by before the Lord, and rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks, and which was followed by an earthquake and fire: for when once a poor sinner is become a refuge here, and is got to his crucified Saviour, and by faith has laid hold on his grace, and entered into his embraces, persecutions, sicknesses, troubles, losses, famine, the sword, and death with all his terrors; and satan with all his rage, may pass
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by and threaten, but "no harm shall happen unto them, nor any evil come near their dwelling." Should such an one be called suddenly at midnight to meet the Bridegroom, he is ready, like a virgin with his lamp burning; and should he see all in flames about him, and find men's hearts failing, he could sing with a holy triumph, The Lord, the eternal God is my refuge, my fortress, my tower, my safe-guard, my strong-hold, the Lord is my hiding-place and my sanctuary for ever!"

Thus shall the man be blessed who takes the Lord's warning, and escapes to Jesus. Thus may you and I be blessed; and as long as we live may we live in this safety; and when we die may we depart in peace, and stand in the judgment boldly, and be indeed like doves who are fled to the clefts of the rock, and are saved.

Grant this, O most dear Saviour, to all here, for thy tender mercies sake. Amen.

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